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**Joint Hearing by the California Legislature Joint Committee on the Master
Plan for Higher Education**

**Testimony by Fresno Unified School District Associate Superintendent
Jorge A. Aguilar**

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March 10, 2010
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AGENDA:

*Eligibility, Admissions, Articulation and Coordination: The relationship between
high school preparedness and eligibility. What are the linkages between college
preparedness and success?*

Good morning Co-Chairs Ruskin and Negrete Mcleod

and members of the committee. My name is Jorge Aguilar, associate
superintendent for equity and access at Fresno Unified School District.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony on the
relationship between high school preparedness and college eligibility.
This topic is of particular relevance to me given my former position at
the University of California, Merced, where I served as associate vice
chancellor for community and educational partnerships responsible for
all student academic and educational partnership programs such as the

Early Academic Outreach Program, P-20 Initiatives, GEAR UP, Upward Bound, Talent Search and others.

In this newly created position, I am responsible for creating practices and procedures that provide all students at Fresno Unified School District, the 4th largest district in the state with more than 73,000 students, an equal opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of opportunities from the widest array of options.

I'll be the first to admit that this is a lofty and vision-like statement that most schools would suggest they embrace. And to be clear, Fresno Unified still has a long way to go toward increasing student achievement for all students. We have made steady progress over the past four years going from approximately one in four students scoring proficient or advanced in their CST ELA and Math to one in three students, but we still have a long way to go to reach our ultimate goal and our achievement gap is still glaring.

Our work around equity and access, though new to our organization, has begun to yield positive results over the past ten months based on our ability to access real-time data as well as tie our efforts to an established accountability system. Our work is very much aligned to Fresno Unified's theory of action calling for an accountability system that is tied to a process called "Cycle of Continuous Improvement", whereby data is made available for use in improving instruction by reallocating resources according to the academic needs of our students. It is a process where everyone in the system is held accountable to a data dashboard indicating where we need to make adjustments and mid-course corrections instead of waiting for yearly data results. Most important, our superintendent's own evaluation by our Board takes into account data results tied to this work and certainly sets the stage for how this could be applied throughout the system.

I would like to publicly commend the Board and Superintendent Michael Hanson for taking the bold, but frankly, uncommon step of creating a cabinet-level position responsible for focusing on this issue. I

purposefully use the word “bold” because we must recognize the fundamental disconnect that exists between legislative pressures placed on the K-12 system both at the state and federal levels around standardized test scores and higher education’s pressures to focus not on K-12’s standardized test scores, but rather on A-G completion as well as application, admission and enrollment rates.

My message to you this morning is that the answer to the question I was asked to provide testimony about is made difficult precisely because of this policy disconnect. Let me repeat, I believe that the answer to the question I was asked to provide testimony about is made difficult precisely because of this policy disconnect. And, unfortunately, neither K-12 nor higher education have a practical incentive to bridge such disconnect.

For example, our state’s API and the federal government’s AYP calculation methods do not take into account whether a high school increases the number of students who complete the A-G course

requirements, or increases the number of students who apply, are admitted and enroll in colleges and universities. And at the other end, higher education is not necessarily rewarded for working with K-12 schools to increase student proficiency rates on CST, CELDT and other standardized tests. Simply put, connecting this fundamental – and very practical – disconnect is at the heart of my responsibilities at Fresno Unified.

Today, I will focus on some of the results our focus on equity and access has yielded related to creating district-wide practices and procedures that increase access for *all* students to, first, have an equal chance to graduate and, second, once in that position to graduate that they have the greatest number of opportunities from the widest array of options. Specifically, I will focus on how we are using the A-G course requirements to measure the degree of inequity that exists for students related to opportunities to enroll in certain courses which then allows us to uncover practices and procedures, or lack thereof, that may be creating those very inequities.

Using student-level data from the University of California's Transcript Evaluation Service which gives us a snapshot of where each student stands by grade level with respect to A-G course completion, we are ~~working with UC Merced's Center for Educational Partnerships to~~ develop databases that give us real-time data of potential inequities in our system.

I'd like to direct your attention to a snapshot of one of those databases which we call the *A-G Monitoring Tool* database. This database allows us to query information related to A-G completion by grade level and student characteristics, including EL status, how students performed in CSU's Early Assessment Program (EAP), Special Ed status, ethnicity, home language and others.

This screen shot, for example, displays the number of students who are on track to complete nine (9), ten (10), and up to eleven (11) A-G units at the end of their 9th grade year. Put another way, this group of students will have 11 of the 15 A-G courses *minimally* required to become

UC/CSU eligible after just one year in high school. They are more than on-track for A-G completion given that UC and CSU guidelines call for 9th grade students to complete three (3) A-G units by the end of their freshman year.

From an equity and access standpoint, I am displaying this screen shot because looking at the left portion of the screen you notice that all of these students attend only two (2) of our eight (8) comprehensive high schools.

This information immediately triggered us to review the transcripts of those students and what we found in all cases was that they entered high school with up to four (4) A-G units under their belt in the area of mathematics and Language Other Than English.

This slide shows an example of one of those student's transcripts which we have access to in real-time through our database.

We then created another database that gives us real-time access to district-wide middle school enrollment information in order to assess whether current practices or procedures may be contributing to this type of inequity.

This next slide shows a view of such database which allows us to select enrollment information in A-G approved subjects at our middle schools. In this case, this particular school has 123 students enrolled in Spanish I which is an approved A-G course. Of those 123 students, nearly 90% of them speak English as their primary language at home and less than 5% speak Spanish.

More importantly, this database allows us assess the extent to which we have *not* provided equal opportunities for students to enroll in these courses by looking at the academic profile of students enrolled in these courses in order to determine if there are others whose academic profile suggests that they, too, could have been placed in those courses.

This next slide shows that 210 students enrolled in schools offering Spanish 1 meet or exceed the academic profile of current Spanish I students who were *not* placed in the same course. *More importantly, 214 students across our district meet or exceed the same profile but are attending schools that do not offer Spanish I.* Hence, these students will *not* have an equal opportunity to start their high school careers with *any* A-G units in the Language Other Than English subject.

This next slide displays a snapshot of another database that allows us to monitor student enrollment for every AP course offered in our district. This database allows us to see in real-time the difference in ethnic distribution of students across our district compared to the ethnic distribution for each individual AP course.

This slide shows the results for one of these courses, AP Calculus, and shows the extent to which students from certain ethnicities are under or overrepresented. Of the 265 students currently enrolled in AP Calculus across our district, for example, just over 3% are African American

despite the fact that African American students make up 11.2% of our total district student population. Hispanic students make up 34% of the students in AP Calculus despite making up nearly 54% of our district's total student population.

More importantly, this database allows us to see the profile of students enrolled in these courses in order to determine if there are others whose academic profile suggests that they, too, could have been placed in the course.

In another instance of a possible inequity, this next slide shows the list of the 148 students in our district who completed the A-G course pattern but did not take either the SAT, ACT, or SAT Subject Area Tests despite having GPAs between 3.5-5.0. We believe this, too, is an inequity because those students, while in a position to graduate, will not have the greatest number of opportunities from the widest array of options.

This final set of slides shows a snapshot of a database that looks at the relationship between standardized test scores and A-G completion. In this case, we can query the number of 9th grade students at each of our comprehensive high schools who, for example, scored FBB as 3rd graders, FBB or BB as 5th graders, and FBB as 8th graders. We have a total of 174 students who fall in this category. Given that these students are 9th graders and we now can access an electronic A-G transcript using one of our databases, I would like to draw your attention to what we see as a pattern for many of these 174 students.

This slide shows one of these student's A-G transcript and you can see that after receiving a FBB score in his/her 3rd grade CST ELA test, a FBB in his/her 5th grade CST ELA test, and a FBB in his/her 8th grade CST ELA test, this student failed every one of his/her A-G courses this past fall semester.

We believe at Fresno Unified that this type of focus on student level data related to *both* standardized test scores as well as college and career-

ready eligibility will continue to shed light on the types of practices and procedures that must be eliminated, altered, enhanced or created in order to ensure that we abide by the guiding principle of our equity and access work calling for students to have an equal opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of opportunities from the widest array of options.

I am proud to say that Fresno Unified will be one of what appears to be very few school districts that will offer students the opportunity to enroll in summer school not just to for credit recovery purposes but to accelerate their possibilities of graduating college and career-ready eligible. One of several components of this acceleration summer school model will, for example, *automatically enroll* all 214 of the students which our database identified as meeting or exceeding the same profile of current Spanish I students but who are attending schools that do not offer Spanish I. Although parents may opt their students out of this class, we believe that automatically enrolling them in summer school will send a strong message to those students and their families as well as our entire community that we are committed to seeing our students

graduate with the greatest number of opportunities from the widest array of options.

The question of *how* schools could use data to prepare students to be college and career-ready eligible while addressing the very real pressures associated with standardized tests *can* be done. *Fresno Unified is doing that now!* We have invested resources in order to build our internal capacity so as to be strategic about addressing current inequities. But to repeat my earlier message, I believe that given the current policy disconnect described earlier, efforts such as Fresno Unified's as well as our Long Beach Unified partner may continue to be isolated and rare. And while we have a great deal of work to do to increase student achievement and close our achievement gap, we are getting better with the passage of time and this body of work serves as a positive example of moving from technical to adaptive change over time.

I started today by publicly commending Superintendent Hanson as well as our Board for taking the bold step of creating a cabinet-level position responsible for focusing on connecting this policy disconnect. It is bold because although I believe that other school districts would see inequities similar to those we're uncovering in Fresno, there is no practical incentive for them to do so.

We believe in Fresno, however, that not shedding light on the types of practices and procedures that must be eliminated, altered, enhanced or created in order to ensure that we abide by the guiding principle of our equity and access work would simply amount to ignoring that *indeed there is a relationship between high school preparedness and college eligibility*.

Although much of our work is currently focused on the access element of our "*equity and access*" initiative, we foresee conversations leading to a direct linkage to classroom instruction to study whether such

instruction is effectively leading to college and career-ready eligible students.

This final slide demands that we in fact study this committee's question more deeply. It shows that 250 of our current 12th grade students who have completed their A-G course requirements with a 3.0-4.5 GPA scored "*Not Yet Ready for CSU Level Course*" in their Early Assessment Program math and English tests. Surely these data suggest that a relationship between high school preparedness and college success *should* exist. In Fresno, we are proud that we have taken the step to access these data in real-time and we intend to study questions such as these in order to implement systemic changes leading greater opportunities for *all* students.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today as well as your leadership in this issue. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.